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ABSTRACT

Program design in nonformal education must take into account the cultural context in which it exists. In developing countries, it can neither reject all values of Western civilization (an impossible task), nor can it embrace Western values without regard to native cultures. The challenge, especially in literacy education, is to become culturally conscious, to preserve what is of value in indigenous cultures and traditions, to renew what must be renewed, and to develop a mutually regenerative relationship between traditional values and science and technology. The educational agenda for all non-Western cultures must support the old culture as it subverts it and reinforce the tradition while renewing it. Practical suggestions for program design in culturally sensitive nonformal education stress the following: (1) building a learning environment; (2) defining needs; (3) defining objectives; (4) selecting clients; (5) choosing content and language; (6) selecting methods and materials; (7) establishing institutional and social arrangements; (8) selecting settings for learning; (9) recruiting instructors; (10) training workers and providing orientation to leaders; (11) motivating teachers and learners and mobilizing resources; and (12) conducting evaluations and developing feedback. The key to the process is participation in the program design by the learners, teachers, local leaders, and extension workers in a genuinely collaborative network of relationships. (25 references) (KC)

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Understanding Culture: A Pre-Condition for Effective Learning

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"Words of Wisdom" for Youth and Adults: The Cultural Context of Program Design

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"Words of Wisdom" for Youth and Adults:

The Cultural Context of Program Design

INTRODUCTION

"Culture and education have a reciprocal, mutually generative, symbiotic relationship." "Cultural traditions should be seen not as obstacles but as reservoirs of collective wisdom and foundations for new learning." -- These understandings are by no means new (Kidd & Colletta, 1980; Hinzen, 1987). But while these understandings have been with us long enough, they have neither been fully internalized by educators, nor actualized in development practice. Problems remain. Some, carried away by their romantic notions of great and sacred traditions, want to regress into their different pasts trying to run away from the new world that refuses to leave them alone. Those who do understand the dialectic between the traditional and the modern and between the local and the global have not always learned to work towards a synthesis that is holistic not patchy, constructive not disruptive, integrative not alienating.

FOCUS AND VALUES

All education -- formal, nonformal and informal -- is an instrument of culture. This paper deals with nonformal

education, with additional focus on adult literacy. The technical concern is program design. Problems of women have been given due attention in the process of program design for adult literacy.

When dealing with sensitive issues of cultures and colonization both values and emotions can get involved, clouding issues and confounding discussion. A clarification of the values implied in the discussion to follow may be useful:

The encounter between Western and non-Western cultures which typically took place within the framework of colonization was a non-mutual and unequal encounter. The Western culture overwhelmed the non-Western cultures, first, because it was the culture of the colonial masters and thereby super-ordinate; and, second, because it was technologically ahead of most indigenous cultures. Natives, working from the assumptions and experiences of their own indigenous cultures were unable to cope with the new realities imposed on them. Most were forced into cultural compromises. Many others lost respect for their own cultural traditions, and borrowed indiscriminately from superficial modes of Western behavior. However, at least the elite of these indigenous cultures, though badly bruised and battered, did enter the twentieth century because of their cultures' encounter with the West.

In our view, the challenge today is not to undo history and to root out everything Western and colonial from our

cultures. That, indeed, is an impossible hope. The challenge today is to become culturally conscious both as individuals and as nations, to heal old wounds, to preserve what is of value in indigenous cultures and traditions, to renew what must be renewed and to reinvent a mutually regenerative relationship between traditional values and modern vectors of science and technology. The educational agenda for all non-Western cultures will have to involve a process that supports the old culture as it subverts it, and that reinforces the tradition while renewing it. It will have to be an education in the dialectic of the old and the new.

CULTURES AND SUB-CULTURES

All we see and experience in the world around us are manifestations of nature and culture. Culture is all that is imagined, expressed, thought, patterned, instituted, woven, fabricated, dug, dammed and built by human beings. The rest is nature.

All human collectivities, living together over long historical times, created their own unique cultures. Within larger cultures, sub-cultures (of women, of street boys, of fishermen, of hunters) developed which were integrated into larger cultures, and were yet significantly differentiated from them. From a world perspective, we can see a wonderfully rich variety of human cultures and sub-cultures; yet there are universals present across all cultures that make one believe in

the common brotherhood of man and the sisterhood of woman.

It should not be concluded from the above that cultures or sub-cultures are somehow unified, homogeneous, and monolithic. Indeed, any "culture is a contested set of symbols and representations. It is neither agreed upon, nor unifying. In fact, within the same social formation, one definition of the group's culture may not match another's (Kendall, 1990)."

CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND EDUCATION

Human beings have been able to create cultures because of their uniqueness in having invented symbol systems (that is, languages) and, consequently, through the use of these languages, to engage in "the symbolic transformations of reality." Communicating such symbolic transformations of reality with others led to commonality, to community, and to culture. Communication is thus the stuff that cultures are made of. Indeed, "cultures exist <u>in</u> communication."

As we communicate, we make and remake our cultures. In turn, our cultures, with the power of collective authority, make and remake us. Every conversation is thus a cultural encounter of greater or lesser significance. Everything we hear, listen to and view is likewise culturally potent. Education is always a cultural encounter of great significance. Its significance lies in the reality that education, whether formal or nonformal, is systematically organized as a cultural project to implement a particular calculus of means and ends. Educational systems,

programs and projects always have particular curricular objectives and a sense of the method for achieving those objectives.

CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Cultural encounters have not only existed within cultures. There have been countless cross-cultural encounters. Of most, we have no historical knowledge, and of others, we know quite a bit. It would be fair to say that when cultures met in peace they learned from each other, and experienced mutual enrichment. However, when cultural encounters were violent, military and political domination was followed by cultural domination. Colonization of the homelands of these cultures led to the colonization of the minds of the peoples within those cultures.

The cultural encounter between the peoples of the West and the non-Western peoples they colonized in Asia, Africa, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand has been mind-boggling in immensity and scope. The unwelcome embrace, in some countries, lasted for centuries. Different cultures, depending upon their historical condition underwent different degrees of decimation. One cannot avoid ambivalence, however, about the colonial experience in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. There is more to the story of colonial cultural encounter than that of a predator culture killing the host and feasting on its remains.

The most important and over-riding reality of the colonial encounter was that it was an unequal encounter. The

culture with technology and organization, and of superior brute force, had overwhelmed the small, relatively powerless pre-technological, and communal cultures. The European colonizers uniformally disallowed uses of indigenous languages in education, politics, law and contracts, dismissed songs and oral expressions of local cultures as ridiculous, considered local dances obscene, local ways of economic production backward, and local ways of living as savage overall.

Looking back with the hindsight of history, and, ironically, using some of the Western values that have now become universalized, it can be seen that the cultural battle may have been unequal in other ways as well. Through historical and cultural processes, some at work even before the arrival of the colonizers and some that were introduced and accelerated during the Western cultural hegemony, many of the native cultures became more or less dysfunctional. There is, of course, nothing much to say in support of in-breeding, woman circumcision, ritualistic drinking of cow's urine and about face marks used in some cultural groups. But tragically, many cultures were, after colonization, now unable even to produce enough to feed their own people and cattle, or to keep the community in relative good health.

Dr. P. Sandeep of the Osmania University, Hyderabad, an intellectual steeped in the Indian tradition, had this to say about the old Indian culture:

The Indian people have fully internalized the hierarchical social relationships preached in the Rigveda, Bhagavadgita, and Manusmriti; and, over the centuries, have institutionalized these relationships within the Indian caste system. In more recent Indian history, under the British, the hierarchical caste relationships had been further reinforced and rationalized to the advantage of the dominant upper classes. In India today, casteism is alive and well. As a result, the Indian people feel absolutely disoriented to the new values of democracy, socialism and secularism enshrined in the Constitution. Indeed, attempts at demythification of old values through adult education is often seen by them as anti-religious (Sandeep, 1981).

In his widely quoted paper J.P. Ocitti of Uganda writes this about the old and the new in one African context:

> ...In trying to find a basis for establishing a working synthesis of the two sets of values represented by the Old and New, educational planners ought to give careful consideration to the following:
>
> 1. Which Old and New values are useless and must be rejected entirely;
>
> 2. Which Old and New values are partly good and therefore require some modification; and
>
> 3. Which Old and New values are good and must be accepted wholly.
>
> Briefly, then the big challenge for our great educators and educational planners is what to jettison, what to modify and what to preserve of the Old and New, the Alien and the Indigenous (Ocitti, 1973: p. 109).

Similar quotes can be found about other non-Western cultures.

The fact is that the Western cultures did bring technology to the ancient cultures of the world and during the last two hundred years they have produced such spectacular successes with technology that no culture today can do without

borrowing and assimilating the new Western technologies into its own cultural fabric. Leaders both in education and culture have emphasised the need for all societies to integrate a "scientific culture" into their indigenous cultures. At the same time, modern technology has changed the old concepts of locality and culture. Locality today is more than a neighbourhood. Cultural boundaries today have been rendered meaningless by the film, television and the VCR.

THE GLOBAL LANDSCAPE OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

As mentioned above, cultures exist in communication. It is impossible to separate a discussion of communication from a discussion of culture.

The search for a New World Information and Communication Order began in the 1970s. The argument for it was simply this: the infrastructures of the new technology were all in the hands of the industrialized world. The Western media were overwhelming the Third World nations, undermining their values, delegitimizing their institutions, and debunking their cultures. There needed to be a "free and balanced flow" of information among nations, and the West should help the Third World in establishing this more balanced, more equitable flow of communication and information. The story of the battles fought on the issue has been told elsewhere (McBride, at al., 1980), but some of the damage can be judged from a study on the importation of films for cinema and television in Egypt:

> Yet, the content analysis of foreign materials transmitted by the Egyptian Television emphasized a danger jeopardizing the cultural integrity and civilization patterns of Egyptian society, that is the negative values reflected by foreign material, and which do not conform to Egyptian and Arab values -- individualism, thievery, violence, crime, aggressivity, fanaticism and alien behaviours. This, in no way, means that all foreign material reflects negative values, because some of it is of a positive nature and does not conflict with the concepts of Egyptian society. (Rachty & Sabat, 1979:77)

It will be naive to think that Egypians, in their day-to-day lives, do not admire individualism, or that the Egyptian society is free from thievery, violence, crime, fanaticism and aggression. The complaint by Rachty and Sabat clearly concerns the unnecessary display, and sometimes the glorification, of these acts and values in the Western media.

The Yaounde Declaration spoke in behalf of the whole of Africa thus:

> In Africa, in the communication field more perhaps than in any other, the prevailing situation is the direct result of the heritage of colonization. Political independence has not always been followed by a decolonization of cultural life or by the elimination of many alienating factors imposed by the colonial system. Communication structures often still conform to the old colonial patterns and not to the needs and aspirations of the African peoples. We are resolved to decolonize them in their turn. We are also determined to extend the opportunities for social communication to the various social, cultural, political and economic groups that currently make up African societies (Unesco, 1981: 23-24)

The Paris conference on adult education may have scored a first by proposing the concept of "cultural security" in developing the personality of the individual, one's true identity by strengthening ties with heritage, history, and

civilization (Unesco, 1985). Also, it is interesting to note that Japan is the only country that is considered to have become technologically ultra modern without losing its appreciation of traditional Japanese cultural forms (Kobayashi, 1981).

Some of the same aspirations embedded in the search for a new communication order are also reflected in the World Decade of Cultural Development (1988-97) now in progress. Its four main objectives are: (1) acknowledging the cultural dimension of development, (2) affirming and enriching cultural identities, (3) broadening participation in culture, and (4) promoting international cultural co-operation (Unesco, 1989:51). In this regard, the need for each of the Third World countries to have its own well thought out cultural policy has been repeatedly brought out in Unesco documentation.

CULTURE AND NONFORMAL EDUCATION

Cultures invent systems of education for their reproduction. In turn, education makes and remakes cultures, through the dialectical process of reproducing and rejecting, continuing and questioning. Nonformal education is clearly an instrument of culture as well. In a pragmatic sense, nonformal education is a highly potent factor of enculturation since its learning is reinforced through use in the real world with more or less immediacy.

What educators working in nonformal education and adult literacy need to understand is that: (1) they are in the

business of making and remaking culture; and (2) they are doing two seemingly contradictory things in their curricula and programming: strengthening and subverting, reinforcing and renewing traditional cultures at one and the same time.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ON CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE NONFORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAM DESIGN

Nat Colletta, in a paper written ten years ago on the topic of nonformal education and culture, made the following insightful statement:

> The central thesis ...is that a culture-based nonformal education development strategy enables new knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be introduced within the framework of existing knowledge, cultural patterns, institutions, values, and human resources. That the indigenous culture is the fabric within which development can best be woven is based upon three assumptions: indigenous elements have traditional legitimacy for participants in development programs; these elements contain symbols that express and identify various valid perceptions of reality; and they serve multiple functions -- they can involve, entertain, instruct and inform (Colletta in Kidd & Colletta, 1980:17).

In the real world of planning and action, we have to interface the process of program design with the concrete manifestations of culture. Pelto (1970), a holistic ethnographer, talks of the following concrete manifestations of a culture: social organization, economics, family structure, religion, politics, ritual, enculturation patterns, and ceremonial behavior. In the process of design, we have to keep all these cultural manifestations in view as make use of them, reinforce them or seek to change and renew them.

At various stages of the process of program design these

are the steps that have to be taken: building a learning environment, defining development and learning needs, defining objectives, selecting clients, choosing content and codes (that is, language), selecting methods and materials, establishing institutional and social arrangements, selecting settings for learning, recruiting instructors, motivating teachers and learners and mobilizing resources, training workers and providing orientation to leaders, and conducting evaluation and developing feedback (Bhola, 1979: 56, 132-133; Bhola & Bhola, 1980). What will make the choices and decisions in regard to program design for nonformal education and adult literacy culturally sensitive?

Building learning environment. Expanding local horizons is one way of creating learning environments. People must see, directly or vicariously, how other communities with similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds are learning and changing their lives. All religious traditions ask their followers to learn. Program designers should borrow from the appropriate tradition to build a positive learning environment, especially for women. Acquiring knowledge should not be offered as something new but as a perennial process with which the community already has experience. The educational processes already embedded in the commmunity must be highlighted and the existing learning environment made visible to everyone. The program designer should help people know of the current modes of seeking, legitimizing and using information in the community, both among

men and women. They should discover what traditional roles or patterns of knowledge dissemination can be strengthened and articulated for creating a learning community. Learning environments flourish when learning is used both by individuals and community institutions to solve real-life problems. The habits of learning and using new knowledge must be made part of the new culture.

Defining needs. Consider not only cultural needs but also subcultural needs, and not only secular but also spiritual needs. The possibility of factionalism and conflict within the community must be accepted. Remember that movements across sub-cultures (caste and class boundaries) within the same one community can not be taken for granted. At the same time, the facilitator must be aware of his/her own values. There will have to be a process of needs negotiation among different constituencies, and between local and national agendas. Make sure that women are given opportunities to express their needs themselves. Problems should be understood in their dimensions of both logic and emotion.

Defining objectives. Definition of objectives is not a simple logical-deductive process. Cultural realities must be allowed to become operative to go from the definition of needs to the definition of objectives. Let women speak in their own behalf.

Selecting clients. The nonformal educator or the adult literacy worker must pay special attention to weeker sections of

the community. Be aware that for domination and subordination to exist in a society, they come to acquire cultural sanction and mystification. Look for and challenge obfuscation which will not be an easy task.

Choosing content and codes (language). The choice of content is again not a logical-deductive matter. Choice of content can have serious consequences for existing social organization. Should content for women liberate or domesticate? Should it prepare women for old roles or new roles? Content has cultural connotations at another level, for example, family planning content. The language is culturally most sensitive. You can not always call things by their real names. Family planning may have to be called child spacing. Appropriate labelling of taboo objects is particularly important (Bhola, 1989a).

Selecting methods and materials. There are cultural expectations about what it means to learn and what constitutes learning materials. The indigenous pedagogy of learning by doing and experiencing should be accommodated in teaching-learning methods. In a literacy program in India, adult learners expected to memorize the alphabet chart first before learning to read and write. They, therefore, did not like the "word method" to which they were being introduced by the program designers. The word method had violated their pedagogical expectations. Films are not always seen as teaching materials. In some areas they are considered downright evil. Folk media and materials are

culturally most appropriate, but folk media have limitations and cannot carry the total burden of instruction. Traditional games can also be used (Evans, 1979) --except that in some cultures games are for children and not for grown-ups. Local materials such as fabrics, banana leaf materials, and wooden surfaces for writing should be used whenever appropriate to the culture. The people's literature -- the Kissay-Kahanian of Punjab, India and the Folhetos of Brazil -- should be put to good uses. With the use of instructional technology, we must also learn to use analogy -- the art of making a point by example -- by using a folk proverb or telling a story (Milimo, 1972; Hinzen, 1987).

Establishing institutional and social arrangements. Institutional and social arrangements for the delivery of programs should be culturally sensitive. Traditional institutions such as Pesantrens (the Islamic schools of rural Java) may be used as well as the Buddist priests of Sri Lanka. Good use has been made in some West African communities of age-sets to mobilize different age cohorts for education and development (Kidd & Colletta, 1980). These roles and institutions will not challenge the existing hierarchies right away, but are bound to adapt themselves in due course of time.

Selecting settings for learning. The image of the formal school is too all-consuming. Learners too often want to fit into a formal learning setting like that of the school. People must be disabused of this image and the patterns of teaching and

learning that it suggests. Nonformal education must be deschooled. Learning and living, learning and working must be joined once again. All community settings such as the church, the mosque, the mandir, the community center, should be used as appropriate. Learners may invite groups to their own homes by turns. Be aware that in mixed groups of males and females, cultural biases will set in even in the seating arrangements for men and women.

Recruiting instructors. The selection of instructors should be given serious consideration. The new secular role of the teacher can create tensions in the traditional role hierarchy in the community. Women instructors for women may be necessary in most cultures with high rates of illiteracy. Males teaching females can reinforce existing perceptions and patterns of super-ordination and subordination. Homophily of cultural backgrounds between instructors and learners will be found to be generally useful. Cultural empathy is a must for instructors and facilitators. Traditional instructional and informational roles such as balladeers, town-criers, mirasis etc. could be used.

Training workers and providing orientation to leaders. Teacher training should be both cognitive and cultural. Teachers must be socialized to become facilitators rather than instructors. They should learn to read non-verbal communication in the culture. These instructors must be provided cultural training especially of a kind to make them sensitive to the

existing language of discourse in a community and to existing syntactical structures -- ways of knowing and saying.

Motivating teachers and learners and mobilizing resources. Metaphors of motivation and mobilization should come from the culture. Gandhi's use of "Sarvodaya" (Soni, 1974; Ariyaratne, 1986) and Thailand's conception of the Khit Pen man (Kowit, 1975) are good examples of such metaphors. Communities may have to contribute resources, but literacy workers should not expect the famished to contribute resources. Religious motivations for charity may be used, such as India's concept of "Vidhya Daan."

Conducting evaluations and developing feedback. Youth and adults need not be subjected to tests and measurements of the formal system. Of course, all cultures engage in evaluations; the challenge is to find out about the already existing culturally approved methods of evaluation and feedback. To make evaluation acceptable, it may have to be made indvidual and private.

THE KEY PROCESS: PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Participatory design implies that we make all design decisions in participation with all the stakeholders involved -- learners, teachers, local leaders, extension workers -- in a genuinely collaborative network of relationships. This makes sense at two levels: at the level of ideology (everyone should be able to participate in the design of his or her destiny) and at the pragmatic level (people feel committed to working on

programs which they have themselves shaped and formed). While the participatory methodology accepts a limited role for the expert, it is based essentially on trust in the people (Tandon, 1988). It does not consider them "ill-prepared" to participate. At their best, participatory strategies can be defined as genuine dialog in the meaning of Paulo Freire. But there must be at least open communication with the people for them to come in contact with their culture (Fry & Thurber, 1989:xv). Instead of controlling, pacifying, or co-opting learners, participatory approaches empower individuals so that they can become independent learners and can act on their own behalf in transforming their world. With participatory strategies there is also a clear and direct legitimization of popular knowledge produced by the people.

Participatory strategies can be applied to both the inter-related objectives of (1) renewing cultures, as the Old and the New are synthesized, and (2) designing and developing nonformal education programs for youth and adults.

Participatory strategies in the area of cultural renewal and synthesis have the advantage that they are not based on bookish and elitist description of the High Culture but on the "living culture" permeating the lives of communities in which individual lives will indeed be immersed. At the program design level the advantage is that local people themselves are the best judges of their needs and allocators of their resources. They

have considerable collective experience of what works and what does not work in their communities, and they know the people they can trust as leaders. It is absolutely important, therefore, that local people participate in the design of nonformal education and adult literacy programs.

It would be naive to think that community interests are paramount and that national visions are unimportant in program design. Indeed, there will have to be a dialectic between the national vision and community needs. National visions will have to be re-invented in local settings. Even in the local setting, there will not necessarily be a consensus about needs. Needs will have to be negotiated among various groups involving the always present, and the always necessary, give and take. We do not mean to suggest that other levels between the center and the local community do not exist or are unimportant. All the various intermediate levels are important, and it is vital that at each level the process of decision-making is participative (Bhola, 1989b).

Finally, there is the question of the <u>representativeness</u> of the community within which the first outlines of a program are designed and experimented. Planned change and, therefore, program design for nonformal education and adult literacy is an <u>experiment</u> in itself. Even after a satisfactory general calculus of means and ends has been invented and tested, in each case new communities must go through the total process of participative

reinvention of the program in their lives and in their communities.

THE KEY PROGRAM IS ADULT LITERACY

The key program of nonformal education for genuine cultural transformation is the program of adult literacy. Language is always the repository of culture. There is nothing that more deeply transforms individual identities and cultures than literacy in the mother tongue. Of course, learners can later transfer their literacy skills, if necessary, to other languages of politics and economy.

At the macro level, literacy campaigns have been used in Viet Nam, Cuba, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua, to name just a few, to change existing class structures and to create new, more egalitarian cultures. Nicaragua's literacy crusade from its very inception was seen as a cultural project to prepare people for transformation and development. There was a deliberate attempt to send urban youth into the rural areas and to expect that women and girls participate as equals of men and boys. The effects of mass literacy campaigns on women and girls in Cuba, Ethiopia and Nicaragua have been of important consequence (Bhola, 1983, 1984; Miller, 1985).

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Hopefully, this paper will have contributed somewhat to our understanding of the nature of cultures, and to the re-inventions that all the world's cultures and sub-cultures are

going through. The paper may also have contributed to our understanding of the cultural dimension of nonformal education and adult literacy, and may perhaps provide some practical guidance on how concrete manifestations of cultures might be used to design specific nonformal education and adult literacy programs in real-life settings.

These understandings must somehow be shared with program officers in nonformal education and adult literacy on the ground level, actually involved in the design a of culturally sensitive program design. Serious problems should be anticipated at the field level. The level of education and experience of our field level adult educators and literacy workers is often such that they are unlikely to be able to define cultural objectives and cultural content in specific communities using genuine participative strategies. Where shall we find the people who are truly bi-cultural and comfortable both within the existing traditions and with new cultural modes of modernity, thus able to help others to examine, renew and create new cultural syntheses? Who is going to provide the necessary training, and how and when?

Finally, the dilemmas that were enumerated and talked about in the body of the paper are by no means resolved. Many micro cultures of the world, under constant attack from Westernization and blinded by the glamour of technology, have literally collapsed. At the same time, the technological

culture associated most directly with the West continues to surge forward in greater and greater strength, all-embracing, encompassing everything, reaching the inner depths of the mind of youth and the outermost limits of space. The cultural encounter between the West and the Third World cultures still remains unequal. This situation requires from all of us greater reflection and greater commitment to a New International Cultural Order.

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